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### **Industrial Contaminants in the Haw**

In June of 2017, team of scientists monitoring the Cape Fear River had discovered high levels of an industrial contaminant called “Gen X.” This unregulated contaminant was found, reported, and traced back to one facility near Fayetteville, that was responsible for the discharge. The accused facility, Chemours, had its discharge permit revoked, and is in continued litigation in which they will be forced to take responsibility for contaminating the public drinking water supply of Wilmington and New Hanover County, and private wells nearby.

In June of 2013, reports were released by the same team of scientists of high levels of similar contaminants in the Haw River. The Haw is the drinking water supply for the Town of Pittsboro, and feeds into Jordan Lake and the Cape Fear, which supply drinking water to a combined total of over 600,000 people.

These contaminants of concern are perfluorinated compounds, a family of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), industrial chemicals with harmful human health impacts. PFASs encompass a wide variety of chemical compounds, which have varying lengths of carbon chains. The longer carbon chains do not break down in water. Perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA), known as C8, has eight carbon chains and has been banned from industrial production in the United States. However, newer shorter chain PFASs have replaced them. Perfluorooctanesulfonic acid, or PFOS is another persistent contaminant that does not break down. These newer compounds have not had extensive health studies or research done to gauge the impacts to human health. As one contaminant becomes regulated, new unregulated contaminants emerge.

In a study by Detlef Knappe, scientist at NCSU, from 2014 - 2016, high levels of seven types of PFASs were found in both the source and finished drinking water for the Town of Pittsboro. The total value of these seven PFASs found in the Haw near Pittsboro was 350 ppt. In 2016, the EPA set a health advisory for total levels of PFOA and PFOS at 70 ppt. Both PFOA and PFOS were found in the Haw above those levels, in addition to 5 other PFASs at higher levels. **Levels of PFASs in the Haw River and in Town of Pittsboro’s drinking water were found to be five times the advisory limits established by the EPA.**

In addition to PFASs, Knappe’s team also found remarkably high levels of an industrial solvent called 1,4 Dioxane. EPA has also listed this contaminant has a likely human carcinogen, and more research is being done to trace direct impacts to human health. This contaminant is widely used as an industrial solvent and as a byproduct of many manufacturing processes. The average levels found in the

Haw were highest in 2015 at 17.1 ug/L. In 2013, the EPA has set a health advisory limit of 0.35 ug/L. **Levels of 1,4 Dioxane in the Haw and in Town of Pittsboro's drinking water were found to be forty-eight times the advisory limits established by the EPA.**

In the case of Gen X in Wilmington, community members were advised to stop drinking the water from their taps. Private well owners received water test results. The industrial polluter was identified and the pollution was stopped at the source. All of this action was taken within one year of the press release.

In the case of PFASs and 1,4 Dioxane in the Haw, there has been no action taken to prevent community members from drinking the contaminated water. There has been no regulatory action to identify sources. There has been no regulatory action to acknowledge the advisory limits set by the EPA. Regulatory agencies in Town of Pittsboro and Department of Environmental Quality have known about these levels since 2013. It has been five years with no action to protect our community members. Unlike the Chemours pollution - from a single source - we believe the perfluorinated compounds and other chemicals in the Haw are coming from numerous industries upriver in Burlington, Greensboro, Reidsville and other cities.

### **Challenges to Protective Action**

Because these contaminants are not regulated, industrial facilities are not required to monitor the levels they are discharging. Wastewater treatment plants and drinking water facilities do not have the capability to monitor or remove these contaminants.

While some industrial facilities have direct discharge permits that list the facility, location of discharge, and what regulated chemicals they are permitted to discharge, other facilities send their pretreated waste into the waste stream of publicly owned wastewater treatment plants. This in effect protects the identity and location of the industrial users. High levels have consistently been found below wastewater treatment plants, which often have over 30 significant industrial users sending wastewater into their waste stream.

Land applied biosludge is supplied to landowners as "free fertilizer." However, the source of the sludge is mostly from wastewater treatment plants that mix industrial and municipal waste. Concentrated solids that include industrial toxins (including perfluorinated compounds, heavy metals, and nutrients) are applied to land. During storms runoff from the sludge fields can end up in streams nearby. Those streams feed into surface waters used as sources for drinking water supplies, including the Haw River for the Town of Pittsboro, and also the Cane Creek Reservoir for Chapel Hill/Carrboro/UNC.

Haw River Assembly is working with a team of scientists to actively monitor several sites along the watershed to capture levels of industrial contaminants, and trace them to their sources. Our initial samples have found industrial contaminants at levels much higher than the health advisory. As we collect more data to verify our results, this information will be made publicly available. We hope to finally see regulators take protective action against industrial pollution and prioritize the health of our communities.

*About Haw River Assembly: Our mission is to promote environmental education, conservation and pollution prevention, to speak as a voice for the river in the public arena, and to put into peoples' hands the tools and the knowledge they need to be effective guardians of the river. Our work is made possible by the efforts and support of our members and volunteers. Visit our website at [ [HYPERLINK "http://www.hawriver.org"](http://www.hawriver.org) ] for more information.*